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March 2, 2011

(Wisconsin Congressional Delegation)
(Federal Agency Heads)

Re: Federal Programs Related to Nanotechnology

Dear ():

The Special Committee on Nanotechnology was created by the Wisconsin Joint Legislative Council to examine the human health and environmental concerns related to the manufacture, use, and disposal of nanomaterials, to consider the monitoring of nanomaterials, and to develop strategies to facilitate the development of nanotechnology to create and retain jobs in Wisconsin, including ways in which the government can help the public and private sectors address potential risks and meet regulatory requirements.

The committee has explored a wide range of issues related to nanotechnology. The activities of the committee can be reviewed at:
<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lc/committees/study/2010/NANO/index.html>.

The committee also conducted a review of various federal policies that relate to nanotechnology. As a result of that review, the committee is seeking your help to effect positive changes in federal policies and programs that will help the State of Wisconsin to position its nanotechnology businesses and research facilities at the forefront of this emerging industry. The committee is of the opinion that the issues identified below are best addressed at the federal level to create uniform regulation and to allow for the most beneficial use of resources. Accordingly, we ask that you consider action on each of the following:

Workplace Safety – The committee asks that relevant federal agencies conduct thorough reviews of existing programs designed to protect worker safety to determine whether they are adequate to ensure the safety of workers who may be exposed to nanomaterials. In particular, the committee is concerned that current regulatory thresholds, which are based on the volume or chemical identity of substances may not be effective when applied to nanomaterials.

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Chemicals Regulation – The committee asks that federal chemicals regulation systems be evaluated to determine whether these regulations should be based on material particle size and particle shape in addition to chemical composition. The committee received information that current regulations based only on chemical compositions of materials do not adequately provide for the unique and potentially volatile characteristics that may be exhibited by nanomaterials that may be relatively safe when existing on a larger scale.

Federal Nanotechnology Studies – The committee received information indicating that research funding focusing on the risks of nanotechnology encompasses a small portion of total federal funding related to nanotechnology research. The committee sees nanotechnology as a positive growth industry with seemingly unlimited potential to provide improvements to our health, our environmental quality, and our overall quality of life. However, it is also important to proactively identify and manage any risks associated with particular materials so that the nanotechnology industry as a whole will not suffer setbacks that may result from a loss of public confidence in this technology.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests, and appreciate the efforts that have already been made by the federal government in support of and with the intent of better understanding nanotechnology. Please feel free to contact us with any questions, comments, or other ways that we might work together in support of this emerging field.

Sincerely,

Senator Sheila Harsdorf, Chair
Special Committee on Nanotechnology

Senator Mark Miller, Vice-Chair
Special Committee on Nanotechnology

SH:MM:jal